

Shakespeare for Children: Adaptations of *the Tempest* by Leon Garfield and Bernard Miles

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Abstract:

Ever since the eighteenth century the adaptations and appropriations of the works of Shakespeare has been increasing gradually. Story is invariably a fluid concept and hence crosses boundaries of language, culture and nation across ages. The art of adaptation, a cross-generic and cross-cultural transformation and a creative reworking of a text, is itself a curious attempt to preserve the original text. Shakespeare-for-children is not a newly developed genre but nearly a two-century-old phenomenon. He is widely and deeply read till now. Hence, the bard's oeuvre is translated, adapted and appropriated in a good many languages for the young and the old alike. The dual purpose of these retellings or rewritings is to educate and entertain the children. Either in classical adaptation such as by Charles and Mary Lamb, Edith Nesbit, or in adaptation by non-canonical writers such as Caroline Maxwell, Elizabeth Wright MacAuley, the form of the retellings is always flexible, sometimes in the original play form and sometimes in the popular storytelling or narrative mode. But Shakespeare's essence remains fresh and intact. Critics characterize several distinct differences between the modern children's Shakespeare and the earlier ones. According to them, the current tradition of children's Shakespeare is more liberal and playful while the early adaptations are moralistic. The present paper aims to explore the philosophy of children's Shakespeare that lies mainly in presenting social issues through the versions of *The Tempest* by Leon Garfield and Bernard Miles.

Keywords: Children, adaptation, illustration, philosophy, purpose, storytelling.

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Children's literature is a subgenre of literature formed by adults for children with, more often than not, the two-fold purpose of entertaining the children and enriching them with moral values. Critics such as Naomi J. Miller, Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Erica Hateley, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Jennifer Hulbert, Charles H. Frey, Robert L. York, John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum concede that Shakespeare fulfills the dual objectives well enough through his entire opus. The stage of London in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was thrived by his works at large. Surprisingly, the Bard is as relevant today as was in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and is at the centre of Britain's theatre industry. Since his oeuvre is fraught with copious materials to rewrite for both the young and the old, it is continuously adapted with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Furthermore, his works have been translated into hundreds of languages and are performed on stage throughout the world till date. The works of Shakespeare provide the audience and readers the scope to enter into a new realm, both alien and familiar, proffering delight as well as moral lesson simultaneously. The authors have been adapting or rewriting his works across centuries till now. The first edition of Shakespeare for children is, very likely, Jean Baptiste Perrin's *Contes moraux amusans et instructifs, a l'usage de la jeunesse, tires des tragedies de Shakespeare (Amusing and Instructive Morality Tales for Youth, Drawn from Shakespeare's Tragedies)*, published in 1783. But the major figures in this arena are Henrietta and Thomas Bowdler, Mary and Charles Lamb, Edith Nesbit, Marchette Chutte, Leon Garfield, Lois Burdett, Marcia Williams, Tina Packer and the like who rewrote many of his works in their original generic form or otherwise. Illustrations, often, are added to make these fascinating and convincing. There are many other non-canonical writers as well such as Caroline Maxwell, Elizabeth Wright MacAuley. Mary and Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* and Thomas Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* are two ground-breaking texts in this context published in 1807. Again these writers, more or less, appropriate Shakespeare in children's literature providing a fascinating impression of the Bard too both in words and pictures. For example, on the back cover of Burdett's *Shakespeare Can Be Fun*, One of her students, Anika (eight years old), describes, "Shakespeare is like a big piece of chocolate cake. Once you've started, you wish you could go on forever, in a nonstopping dream" (1999). Edith Nesbit is also a distinguishable name in Shakespeare adaptation who wrote *The Children's Shakespeare* in 1897. Furthermore, there are the adaptations such as Elizabeth Wright Macauley's *Tales of the Drama* (1822), Caroline Maxwell's *The Juvenile Edition of Shakespeare: Adapted to the Capacities of Youth* (1828), Marchette Chutte's *Stories from Shakespeare* (1956), Tina Packer's *Tales from Shakespeare* (2006), Marcia Williams's *Tales from Shakespeare* and *More Tales from Shakespeare*, Blackie's *Stories Old and New* (1917) and many more.

Critics specify striking differences between the modern versions of children's Shakespeare and adaptations of the earlier days. Naomi J. Miller asserts in this connection that "early nineteenth and twentieth century adaptations commonly focused on bringing children to Shakespeare through frames of significance that reproduced adult concerns with the 'meanings' or 'messages' of the play" while,

Many late twentieth and early twenty-first century adaptations...endeavour to bring Shakespeare to children through 'play' and the concept of playing, involving a sea-change in notions of the agency of the literate child, where 'literary' is associated not so much with literal 'knowledge' of quotable lines from 'high literature' as with comfort and active familiarity with the 'sounds and sweet airs' of the source. (2007, 139)

So the modern versions of children's Shakespeare are more liberal and playful in comparison with the overly moralistic approach of the earlier adaptations. Shakespeare adaptations for children explore mainly social issues making significant contributions to our analysis and understanding of present complex world culture. However, the purpose of retelling is explicit in the Preface of the first printed adaptation of *Merchant of Venice, The History of Shylock the Jew* (1794). The anonymous author emphasizes on the moral value of Shakespeare's works that Shakespeare's "ideas are generally natural and sublime abounding with instructions for our conduct in life, our duty to GOD and one another; our love of religion, justice, mercy, and every attribute which can render us good, virtuous, and happy" (*History*, 1784, 8). Lamb, too, asserts in the preface of his *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) that his works are "strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity" and added that "for of examples, teaching these virtues his pages are full" (Lamb, 1807, I, ix).

Didacticism combined with pleasure is, generally, a basic element in children's literature and Shakespeare's adaptations for children are effective tools to fulfill this aim. Moreover, it is his use of poetic language, rhythms and sounds that children can access with ease. Erica Hateley puts it thus:

"The competition between entertainment and education in children's literature becomes a complex cooperation when Shakespeare is deployed, as he is perceived by 'adult culture' as serving both needs" (*Shakespeare* 3).

The Tempest, that provides such a riveting account of magical and musical spell, has long been adapted for children beginning in the first decade of the nineteenth century. These are mainly illustrated storybook versions authored by Leon Garfield (1985), Bernard Miles (1986), Bruce Coville (1994), Ann Beneduce (1996), Marcia Williams (1998) and Lois Burdett (1999). Furthermore, there are the adaptations by Charles and Mary Lamb (1807), E. Nesbit (1900), and Marchette Chute (1956). Interestingly, the Bowdlerized edition remains intact in the original form of the Shakespearean texts. The authors themselves demand it to be "unexceptionable" but "with a little alteration" in the Preface of the first edition (1823, 1b). This "little alteration" is, in fact, the omission of the words and phrases, the scenes and situations which threat morality and sense of decorum of the society and thereby makes it aesthetically designed especially for the child. Yet most of the adaptations of *The Tempest* are in narrative form making them easy to understand by and accessible to the children. This cross-generic transformation of the adaptations from a play to a narrative mode is quite significant insofar as the adaptor claims to

take on all the roles that a play offers such as of director, actor, and even of audience. As a consequence, the role of the child changes too. It rather plays the role of the observer being engrossed in the illustrations and storytelling mode offered by these adaptations than the interactive role that the genre of play offers. The purpose of the adaptors may be well understood through the words of John Stephens and Robyn McCallum:

First, they have a role in making Shakespeare accessible and popular. Second, they are instrumental in the continued and cultural canonization of Shakspeares, and simultaneously, in the construction of a canon of Shakespeare's texts told for children . . . And third, reversions of Shakespeare's texts perform a key role in the transmission of the culture's central values and assumptions to children.
 (Retelling 255-56)

The cross-generic transformation of the Shakespearean plays in order to make these suitable for children often demands several changes. The plot must be changed into a linear and chronological order making it lucid so that the child reader grasps it effortlessly. The stories of the adapted versions of Burdett, Williams and Chute remain almost intact with that of original as their narratives open with the turbulent sea and the desperate decks of Alonzo's ship. Richard Monette says, Burdett's adaptation is appropriate for the elementary students that "reinvent Shakespeare's plays, creating their own unique versions of his stories and his characters." The other adaptors deviate a little from Shakespeare in the storytelling. These authors suppress, condense or rearrange events in order to make the narratives more attractive and interesting to the child-readers than the earlier editions. Megan Lynn Isaac's observation is substantial in this regard:

The process of turning the dialogue of a play into the narrative of a story forces the editor to take interpretive positions. There are no stage directions in *Hamlet* to explain how King Claudius should deliver his lines, but if an adaptor of the play tells readers that Claudius spoke 'slyly', 'with a sneer', or 'in an oily voice' readers receive a very specific message about how to interpret the King". (Isaac, 2000, 7)

Leon Garfield's adaptation of *The Tempest* often deviates from the original one. While narrating the story, the narrator both describes and analyses the importance of the characters and the situations. His version opens with Prospero and Miranda, "an ageing man and his young lovely daughter" observing the tempest sitting upon the shore of an unknown island: "They were staring out to sea" (51). The tempest is raised under the magical power of Prospero. The readers conjoin them too but only from a distance. They, as if, witness the tempest with Prospero and Miranda. Prospero pacifies her daughter giving a detailed account of the truth regarding their banishment to this unknown island as far as possible. Yet he is restless as he is trying to save each and every life aboard the storm-tossed ship at mid-sea: "He stood up, and, frowning, began to pace to and fro, making little yellow tempests in the sand, which his long, heavy cloak, smoothed away, so that he seemed to have walked, invisibly, on air" (52).

Prospero seems to be victorious observing his enemies aboard the tempest-tossed ship. Ariel becomes a true informer who makes the readers know that he makes Ferdinand isolated on the island. Ariel is characterized “with a queer sideways smile” (55) of a conspirator. A negative characterization of Caliban may be found in this adaptation of Garfield where he is characterized as “the misshapen creature...with sunken eyes” (57). The movements of Sebastian and Antonio preparing themselves to kill Alonso are described in minute details: they “begin to stroll about, on tiptoe, and to peer and stare among the trees” (61). The child readers are curious enough. The voice of the narrator comments on the events often: Trinculo is “the king of Naples’ jester, an ageing fool who lived only in the echo of old jokes. Saved from the shipwreck by a Providence that plainly did not know right from wrong, he wandered across the shore. . . .” (63).

Prospero is not without a fault. The narrator provides the exemplifications of his vanity and feeling of supremacy as a great enchanter: “the great enchanter was not without vanity. Seeing the enchantment in which the lovers held one another, he was stirred to show them that his own power was still greatest” (69). The narrator follows Shakespeare in most of the cases in depicting Prospero. For all his faults he is presented towards the end as a superhuman figure in control. The narrator relates that Prospero breaks his staff and casts away his book. “He had no more need of them, nor of the enchanted isle. By his art he had made men see themselves, and, through make-believe, come to truth. Now he, too, like Ariel and Caliban, longed to be free” (74).

Miles’s adapted version of *The Tempest* is worth mentioning here as well. His narrative sticks to the plots of the original version of Shakespeare. Yet he deviates often from playwright while narrating the story. For him, the love story of Ferdinand and Miranda receives much less attention than any other story elements. Ariel’s compliance with Prospero, Caliban’s flippant worship of Stephano and the flights of fancy of Sebastian and Antonio – all receive more narrative attention than the lovers. Caliban is the principal source of comedy. He also plays a significant role at the end of the story after Prospero has left the island and surrendered his “crystal ball”. Ariel tries to teach Caliban and make him learn fruitlessly. Caliban becomes the possessor of the island at the end. He is portrayed as a relaxed person “drowsily chewing a blade of grass, with his back to a tree, his legs spread out before him, happily doing his best not to think about anything at all. He’s got his island back at last” (35).

Miranda is the centre of attraction in Miles’s story. The story develops as she grows into a pretty young lady. When she first arrived at the unknown island with her father, she was only of three years old. Prospero is a nurturing and protective father, Caliban a jealous competitor, and Miranda is a wild and free daughter, hoping only “for company her own age”. The narrative voice of this story is cheerful, graceful and pleasant. Prospero is introduced in the story with this jubilant and assertive mood: “Now the Duke in this story is called Prospero, and I’m afraid he cannot be bothered to look after his own province, let alone try to take over anyone else’s.”

The story develops in an engaging manner: “Prospero tries to teach Caliban manners, but I’m afraid he isn’t very successful. Caliban simply will not stop eating with his fingers and slopping his soup all over the table.” Miles’s voice governs and controls the narrative and captures the

comic essence of the storyline. Violence, anger and evil are present in the story but not with seriousness. Prospero laughs at Caliban's plot and his forgiveness of Alonzo and Antonio is quick and easy which requires no prompting from Ariel.

Illustrations serve a definite purpose of making stories more interesting, authentic and acceptable to the children and young readers alike. Probably, to this end, the Shakespeare adaptations for children in the twentieth and twenty-first century make a sumptuous use of illustrations, sometimes comic, sometimes intellectual. Lois Burdett's *The Tempest* is full of illustrations of characters and incidents and in some of these the son of the witch, Sycorax, Caliban is portrayed in different colours such as red, orange, green and in many more. If Burdett portrays Caliban as "monster" and "grotesque" (Burdett, 1999, 23), Lamb depicts him as "far less human in form than an ape" (Lamb, 1807, 2). Nesbit, Garfield, Packer too describes Caliban in the similar sympathetic way as Lamb does. Nesbit describes that Prospero, the "great magician", "found it necessary to treat with harshness" Caliban, who is "vicious and brutal in all his habits" (1936, 35) and the most despicable animal. In this context it is worth mentioning that Burdett's version make a wonderful use of rhyming couplet.

Transforming *The Tempest* from Shakespeare's play to a story for children requires different changes. The storybook authors have to keep in their mind always the length of the story which is retold. Plainly, *The Tempest* has been adapted as a love story, as a growing up story, as a jolly, comic story about a foolish monster, and as a story about an enchanter wrestling with his own power and vanity. What is important in this adaptation is the linearity of plot and the addition of a narrative voice in order to be accepted by the children. Sometimes it is not the story or plot but the presence of the actors or particular performers who have been most powerful in surprising or compelling attention to the child-readers. Shakespeare's plays have an openness that requires interaction. These are always read with collaborative effort. However, the choice of the narrative as the form to present Shakespeare has many justifications. His language is translated and 'adult' themes are presented in such a way as to make the children understand.

Kids are actually both creators and performers of the text while they join with the author in interpreting the text which becomes an interactive one. Children are creative, enthusiastic and interactive learners. British teacher Fred Sedgwich has said in *Shakespeare and the Young Writer*, "The power of what children learn when they play with Shakespeare's words derives from the fact that play, being active, is bound up with choice: playing with words requires constant decisions. Decisions require thought and thought causes that dangerous thing—learning—about Shakespeare, about words, about life and its glories and problems." Most of all children's Shakespeare underlies the credence that Shakespeare is good for everyone, and that his plays cast a positive shadow and influence upon his readers which is perhaps at the root of all the genres of Shakespeare-for-children adaptations and appropriations such as films, graphic novels, comics, animations, picture books, stage productions and the like. The earlier adaptors of Children's Shakespeare recognize that the new versions are with the one purpose – shaping children, while the modern adaptors of children's Shakespeare seem to have an awareness to change and improve children at the same time while experiencing with Shakespeare.

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